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ABSTRACT

This survey, conducted in 1966 by the Washington Foreign Language Program, analyzes the possible effect of the secondary school principal on language programs directly or indirectly attributable to his foreign language background and attitudes. Some 369 questionnaires returned by the principals provided information concerning biographical data, foreign language background, foreign language programs in the schools, and foreign language opinion. Concluding remarks based on analysis of tables in this report suggest that foreign language study on the part of the principal has no consistent effect on the foreign language program in his school nor his attitudes toward foreign languages in general. However, the attitudes of a principal toward the study of foreign languages do influence his foreign language program. (RL)

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A SURVEY OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE BACKGROUND AND ATTITUDES OF PRINCIPALS IN WASHINGTON STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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A SURVEY OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE BACKGROUND AND ATTITUDES OF PRINCIPALS IN WASHINGTON STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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During a series of conferences held in the state of Washington and sponsored by the Washington Foreign Language Program during the Spring of 1966, foreign language teachers expressed a desire for a survey to be made of the foreign language background and attitudes of secondary school principals in the state. These teachers felt that such information, after being analyzed, might be shown to have an affect on the position of foreign language in the state and in the individual secondary schools. For example, teachers assumed that principals who had studied a foreign language would be more receptive to foreign language as part of the curriculum and that those who felt foreign language should be studied by all students would work harder to develop a strong foreign language program. With the above ideas in mind, a survey was conducted by the Washington Foreign Language Program to determine the foreign language background and opinions of secondary school principals in order to draw some conclusions about their affect on foreign language programs in the schools.

Procedure

A biographical data sheet together with a three-part questionnaire and explanatory letter were sent to all secondary school principals in the state. Overall response was quite good--369 out of 475 (or seventy-seven percent) questionnaires were returned. The following sections

summarize the answers to the biographical data sheet and questionnaire[1] with emphasis on the more interesting items for discussion.

Biographical Data

From the information derived in this survey, we found that the typical (or majority of principals) secondary school principal in Washington is approximately forty years old, attended high school, college and graduate school in Washington and received a Master's degree. He has been a principal less than ten years and has held his present position less than five years. Classroom teaching experience of five to ten years was mostly in the fields of Science, Math, Physical Education, Social Studies and/or English.

Foreign Language Background

A large majority of the respondents had studied a foreign language, predominantly Spanish, Latin, German or French. Very few considered themselves proficient in reading and even fewer in speaking the language studied. Even though a substantial number had studied a foreign language, they had not necessarily done so to meet either a college entrance requirement or a college degree requirement as less than one-third had to fulfill either of these. Approximately two-thirds of the principals had never traveled to a foreign country, but all except a small percentage expressed a desire to visit another country.

Foreign Language Programs in the Schools

The overall foreign language enrollment is what would be considered

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[1] A detailed account of the answers with statistics is given at the end of the report.

normal. Most schools have somewhere between ten and thirty-five percent of their students enrolled. Junior Highs, however, have a smaller percentage enrolled than High Schools. The number of years of a foreign language offered varies from none to five. Surprisingly, a larger percentage of Junior Highs than High Schools offer three years of foreign language, while more High Schools offer two years of a foreign language. Also, very few High Schools offer one year or less of language, but one-third of the Junior Highs fall into this category. Most of the respondents do not anticipate a change in the number of years of language taught, although several felt the number would be increased and a few anticipated a decrease.

Unfortunately, the question which asked for the level at which a student could begin foreign language study was interpreted two different ways, i.e. one as to the particular school and the other in regard to the district. Therefore, the statistics for this question were not considered an accurate indication of the beginning level and were not made a part of this report.

Two questions were asked about Latin. Examining the responses, we found that over seventy percent of the schools did not offer Latin. In the thirty percent which did, most schools had an enrollment of at least twenty and almost one-third had more than fifty. But as we had anticipated, a majority of principals reported that enrollment was smaller than five years ago.

Of particular concern to the foreign language teachers and to this study was the basis, if any, for the selection of students or for their exclusion from taking a foreign language. The school principals state,

contrary to what the teachers have been saying, that generally there are no criteria for selecting students, nor are students excluded if they desire to enroll. In those schools which did specify a basis for selection or exclusion, the most predominant criteria were a student's overall grade point average and/or his language arts grades.

As a rule, principals have not had much difficulty in staffing foreign language courses. Of those who did, there was no consistent indication of any particular language being harder to staff than any other.

An examination of the statistics regarding the smallest enrollment allowed for a foreign language course revealed another interesting fact. An overwhelming percentage of schools allowed a class of fifteen or fewer students in a foreign language. A frequent criticism of teachers expressed at the previously-mentioned series of conferences was that too often foreign language courses are dropped because of small enrollments. When the enrollment did fall below the established minimum, the most frequent solutions were either to drop the course or to combine it with another course. The largest enrollment normally allowed was thirty-four.

We were also surprised to find that a majority of High Schools did not have a clustering of students taking the first year of a foreign language at the junior year to meet the foreign language entrance requirement at the University of Washington. However, almost forty percent did indicate that such a clustering exists which might mean that the University of Washington entrance requirement together with the proficiency tests encourages students to wait until their junior year to begin foreign language study.

Foreign Language Opinion

Unfortunately, two of the questions in this section were not clear, and therefore, the answers could not be interpreted for this study.[2] When asked if they would recommend a foreign language requirement for teacher certification, the majority of principals replied negatively. Only fifteen percent favored such a requirement. The majority also felt that foreign language is for a select group, yet they are the same ones who said that they do not have a selection process for foreign language students. If the above statement is assumed to be the general rule, then evidently the individual attitudes of principals do not influence the actual selection policy in the schools.

Although a majority of the principals were opposed to the present foreign language entrance requirement of two years at the University of Washington, only slightly more than one-fourth suggested dropping the requirement. A larger proportion had no recommendations.

When asked if they sould support a new program in any of ten language, the principals responded favorably, three-fourths indicating support of at least one and sometimes two or three language. Russian was the most popular choice, followed by German.

The final question asked for the major justification for taking a foreign language. Answers varied from use for travel to cultural understanding to no justification. From the standpoint of the principals,

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[2]These questions were

Would you make any changes in the present foreign language degree requirements in state institutions of high learning?

If so, what would you recommend?

the major justification appears to be for cultural understanding, while the most minor is college entrance.

Conclusion

Further breakdowns of the responses of principals who had studied a foreign language and those who had not failed to reveal any significant differences in their opinions about the basis for foreign language selection, nor did they indicate any striking differences in the foreign language programs in their schools. Responses for almost all categories were similar, the only notable difference being in the attitude toward the foreign language entrance requirement at the University of Washington. Twice as many of the ones who had studied a language felt it was desirable as those who had had no language experience.

In an attempt to relate the attitudes of principals toward who should take a foreign language to their respective foreign language program, we found a trend which supports one of the assumptions of foreign language teachers in Washington. In all but one question relating to the language programs, we found that principals who favor foreign language for every student have a stronger foreign language program than those favoring a select group. For example, the "every student" group generally allowed a smaller minimum number of student for foreign language classes, had a larger percentage of the total student body enrolled in foreign language, and offered more years of foreign language. The only exception was the larger percentage of the "select group" principals who expected to increase the number of years of a foreign language offered.

On the basis of our survey, we can conclude that the amount of foreign language study of a principal has no consistent affect on the foreign language program in his school nor his attitudes toward foreign language in general. As noted above, however, we have some basis for the conclusion that the attitude of a principal toward the study of foreign language does influence his foreign language program.

SUMMARY OF ANSWERS TO PRINCIPAL SURVEY BY PERCENTAGES

All answers to the biographical data section and to the questionnaire were categorized and then tabulated by IBM into percentages.

TABLE I-1

Distribution of Ages of Principals

Ages	Percentage
22-29	3.0
30-39	26.6
40-49	38.2
50-59	21.4
Over 60	8.4
No Answer	2.4

TABLE I-2

Distribution of Locations of High Schools Attended by Principals

Location	Percentage
Puget Sound	23.6
Washington, other than Puget Sound	45.8
Oregon	3.8
Idaho	7.6
States east of the Miss.	8.7
Other	10.0
No Answer	.5

TABLE I-3

Distribution of Location of College or University Attended by Principals

Location or School	Percentage
University of Washington	8.4
Other Washington state schools	34.6
Other Washington schools	14.7
Pacific Northwest schools other than in Washington	7.1
Washington and Pacific Northwest schools	4.1
Other out-of-state	10.4
Combination of Washington colleges & universities	13.1
Washington & out-of-state	7.4

TABLE I-4

Distribution of Location of Graduate Schools Attended by Principals

Location or School	Percentage
University of Washington	21.0
Other Washington state schools	29.4
Other Washington schools	10.6
Pacific Northwest schools other than in Washington	7.4
Washington and Pacific Northwest schools	4.4
Other out-of-state	4.4
Combination of Washington colleges and universities	15.5
Washington & out-of-state	7.4

TABLE I-5

Number of Years of Service as a Principal

Years	Percentage
Less than 5	28.7
5-10	36.0
11-15	15.4
16-20	8.9
21-25	5.4
More than 25	4.9
No Answer	.5

TABLE I-6

Number of Years of Service in Present Position by Principals

Years	Percentage
Less than 5	50.4
5-10	32.5
11-15	8.1
16-20	5.7
21-25	1.5
More than 25	1.1
No Answer	.8

TABLE I-7

Number of Years of Classroom Teaching Experience by Principals

Years	Percentage
Less than 5	14.4
5-10	45.0
11-15	17.6
16-20	7.3
21-25	2.2
More than 25	.8
No Answer	12.7

TABLE I-8

Distribution of Fields of Classroom Teaching Experience of Principals

Field	Yes(%)	No(%)
Science	33.7	66.3
Math	38.0	62.0
Physical Education	25.3	74.7
Social Studies	45.0	55.0
English	28.2	71.8
Self-contained class	20.4	79.6
Industrial Arts	11.1	88.9
Business	4.9	95.1
Fine Arts	4.3	95.7
Foreign Language	4.1	95.9
Counseling	5.4	94.6

TABLE II-1

Percentage of Principals Who Have Studied a Foreign Language

	Yes (%)	No (%)
All	70.5	29.5
High School	29.2	30.8
Junior High	72.3	27.7

TABLE II-2

Distribution of Languages Studied by Principals

Language	Percentage
Spanish	23.8
French	11.2
German	15.4
Latin	18.5
Scandinavian	1.5
Other	.5
Latin & French or Spanish	10.8
Latin & German	3.0
Other combination	9.2

TABLE II-3

Do You Consider Yourself Proficient in Reading or Speaking a Foreign Language?

	Yes (%)	No (%)
Reading	13.5	86.5
Speaking	8.1	91.9

TABLE II-4

Did You Have a College Foreign Language Entrance Requirement?

	Yes (%)	No (%)
All	31.9	76.6
Those who studied a foreign language	43.8	55.2
Those who did not study a foreign language	2.8	97.2

TABLE II-5

Did You Have a College Foreign Language Degree Requirement?

	Yes (%)	No (%)
All	23.8	76.2
Those who studied a foreign language	34.6	55.4
Those who did not study a foreign language	0.0	100.00

TABLE II-6

Have You Traveled to a Foreign Country Other Than During Military Service?

	Yes (%)	No (%)
All	34.1	65.9
Those who studied a foreign language	34.2	65.4
Those who did not study a foreign language	33.9	66.1

TABLE III-1

Present Enrollment in Secondary Schools

Enrollment Number	Percentage
Less than 100	6.0
100-299	21.7
300-499	14.9
500-999	32.8
1000-1499	16.0
1500-1999	7.6
2000 or more	1.1

*Junior High School
**High School

TABLE III-2

Percentage of Total School Enrollments Taking a Foreign Language

% of Enrollment	All(%)	JHS(%)*	HS(%)**
Less than 10%	14.9	25.2	14.2
10-19%	18.7	25.2	15.1
20-24%	15.2	15.5	15.1
25-29%	13.0	7.7	17.1
30-34%	14.1	9.0	18.0
35-39%	5.7	3.9	7.0
40-44%	7.9	7.1	8.5
45-54%	4.3	3.2	5.0
55% and over	2.2	.6	3.0
No Answer	4.1	2.6	4.2

TABLE III-3

Number of Years of Foreign Language Offered in the Secondary Schools

Number of Years	All (%)	JHS (%)	HS (%)	Studied a Foreign Language (%)	Did not study a Foreign Language (%)
None	5.4	11.6	.9	5.4	5.5
1	9.8	22.6	.5	10.8	7.3
2	35.0	24.5	42.0	31.9	42.2
3	32.2	38.7	27.4	31.9	33.0
4	11.7	2.6	17.3	12.7	9.2
5	4.3	0.0	7.0	5.0	2.8
No Answer	1.6	0.0	2.8	2.3	0.0

TABLE III-4

Distribution of Changes Anticipated by Principals in the Number of Years of Foreign Language Offered

Changes	All(%)	Studied a Foreign Language(%)	Did not study a Foreign Language(%)
None	63.7	61.5	66.0
Decreased	2.4	2.7	1.8
Increased	12.5	12.3	12.8
No Answer	21.4	22.7	18.3

TABLE III-5

Distribution of Latin Enrollments in Schools

Number enrolled	All(%)	Schools offering Latin(%)
0	71.3	0.0
1-9	2.7	9.4
10-19	3.3	11.3
20-29	6.8	23.6
30-39	4.6	16.0
40-49	3.0	10.4
50 or more	8.4	29.2

TABLE III-6

Relative Size of Present Latin Classes Compared with Size Five Years Ago

Size now compared to five years ago	All (%)	Schools offering Latin (%)
Not offered	68.8	0.0
Larger	4.1	13.2
Smaller	19.5	62.2
About the same	7.3	23.7

TABLE III-7

Criteria for Selection or Exclusion of Students From Taking a Foreign Language

Criteria	Percentage which use this criterion		
	All	Studied a Foreign Language	Did not study a Foreign Language
Grade Point Average	14.1	14.2	13.8
Previous language arts grades	17.6	18.1	16.5
Student's desire to take a language	3.5	3.1	4.6
Teacher's recommendation	4.1	4.2	3.7
Grade point average and teacher recommendation	3.8	3.5	4.6
Intention to go to college	2.2	2.3	1.8
None	42.8	40.8	47.7
Other	5.1	5.8	3.7
Combination of two or more of the above	6.8	8.1	3.7

TABLE III-8

Experience of Principals in Securing Foreign Language Teachers

	Percentage
Have had difficulty	35.2
Have had no difficulty	56.1
Seldom have had difficulty	1.1
Sometimes have had difficulty	6.0
No Answer	1.1
No languages offered	.5

TABLE III-9

Languages Which Are More Difficult to Staff than Others

Language	Percentage
None	70.2
Spanish	1.9
French	3.8
Latin	4.3
German	3.8
Russian	1.6
Combination	12.2
No indication	2.2

TABLE III-10

Smallest Number of Students Allowed for a Foreign Language Class

Number	All(%)	Studied a Foreign Language(%)	Did not study a Foreign Language(%)
Less than 5	5.4	4.6	7.3
5-10	32.7	28.5	42.2
11-15	22.9	25.0	17.4
16-20	9.3	9.6	8.3
21-25	3.3	4.2	.9
No minimum	15.3	15.0	15.6
No answer	11.2	12.3	8.3

TABLE III-11

Largest Number of Students Allowed for a Foreign Language Class

Number	Percentage
15-19	1.1
20-24	6.8
25-29	17.1
30-34	32.7
35-39	15.5
40 and over	2.4
No maximum	11.4
No answer	13.9

TABLE III-12

Actions Taken When Enrollment in Foreign Language Classes Falls Below the Minimum Requirement

Actions taken	All(%)	Studied a Foreign Language(%)	Did not study a Foreign Language(%)
Drop the course	33.5	30.4	40.4
Make it a conference course	3.3	2.3	5.5
Combine course with a similar one	10.4	11.9	6.4
Nothing	16.3	18.1	11.9
Assign teacher an extra teaching load	.5	.8	0.0
Situation has never arisen	10.9	11.9	8.3
Transfer students to another school	2.2	2.7	.9
Either drop the course or combine it with a similar one	2.2	2.3	1.8
No answer	20.7	18.8	24.8

TABLE III-13

Appearance of Clustering of Students Taking Foreign Language at the Eleventh Grade

	Percentage
Yes	38.4
No	56.4
No answer	5.2

TABLE IV-1

Attitudes of Principals Toward Recommending a Foreign Language Requirement for Teacher Certification

	All(%)	Studied a Foreign Language(%)	Did not study a Foreign Language(%)
Would recommend	15.3	16.5	11.9
Would not recommend	75.7	72.3	82.6
Might recommend	3.3	6.2	4.6
No answer	5.7	4.2	.9

TABLE IV-2

Attitudes of Principals Toward Which Students Should Take Foreign Language

Who should take a Foreign Language	All(%)	Studied a Foreign Language(%)	Did not study a Foreign Language(%)
Every student	31.6	30.8	32.0
Select group	61.0	61.9	57.8
No opinion	7.4	6.2	9.2

TABLE IV-3

Attitudes of Principals Toward the Desirability of the University of Washington Foreign Language Entrance Requirement

	All(%)	Studied a Foreign Language(%)	Did not study a Foreign Language(%)
Find it desirable	27.5	31.9	16.5
Find it undesirable	58.9	53.5	70.6
Find it sometimes desirable	3.2	3.1	9.2
No answer	10.4	10.8	3.7

TABLE IV-4

Attitudes of Principals Toward Supporting New Foreign Languages Where Financially Feasible

Languages	All (%)		Studied a Foreign Language(%)		Did not study a Foreign Language(%)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
None	25.3	74.7	26.9	72.3	21.1	78.9
Spanish	16.9	82.8	16.5	83.1	17.4	82.6
French	16.9	83.1	15.4	83.8	20.2	79.8
German	27.2	72.8	25.4	74.6	31.2	68.8
Latin	9.3	90.7	8.8	91.2	10.1	89.9
Russian	37.6	62.4	36.5	63.5	39.4	60.6
Japanese	12.3	87.7	14.6	85.4	6.4	93.6
Chinese	15.5	84.5	15.0	85.0	16.5	83.5
Norwegian	3.8	96.2	4.6	95.4	1.8	98.2
Swedish	3.8	96.2	5.0	95.0	1.8	98.2
Other	.8	99.2	1.2	98.8	0.0	100.00

TABLE IV-5

Attitudes of Principals Toward the Major Justification for Taking a Foreign Language

Justifications	All (%)		Studied a Foreign Language(%)		Did not study a Foreign Language(%)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Travel	9.0	91.0	9.6	90.4	7.3	91.7
Cultural understanding	42.1	57.9	43.8	55.4	36.7	62.4
Use in career	8.4	91.6	7.7	91.5	10.1	89.9
For college entrance	4.1	95.9	2.7	96.3	7.3	92.7
Discipline of mind	7.6	92.4	6.5	92.7	10.1	89.9
Broader education	9.3	90.7	9.6	89.6	8.3	91.7
Self improvement	7.1	92.9	7.7	91.5	5.5	94.5
Improve English	9.0	91.0	9.6	90.4	7.3	92.7
Communication and other	18.8	81.2	18.1	81.9	19.3	78.9
None	13.1	86.9	12.7	87.4	13.8	86.2